

## **PROMISING GE Hitachi plan offers path to jobs recovery**

Paducah Sun Editorial

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Last week's announcement that the U.S. Department of Energy has embraced Global Laser Enrichment's proposal for re-use of the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant was welcome news. While the plan is at this point just a proposal, there's every reason to believe the project will go forward, to the great benefit of this community.

GLE is a subsidiary of North Carolina-based GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy, a multinational consortium that markets advanced reactors and nuclear services. GLE proposes to use its proprietary laser enrichment process at a facility it would build in McCracken County to extract enriched uranium from depleted "tails," a byproduct of the older enrichment process.

The price tag on the new plant has been placed at \$1 billion, and the investment would mean thousands of construction jobs and an estimated 300-400 permanent, high-paying jobs at a facility estimated to operate at least 40 years.

This has to be kept in perspective, of course. The new jobs will fall well short of the 1,100 that are being lost as the existing, outmoded gaseous diffusion plant is being wound down. And assuming GLE and DOE come to terms (DOE owns the vast McCracken County enrichment plant and has leased it in recent years to private operators), the company says it still will face a multi-year licensing process before it can begin construction.

In the interim, this community will have to deal with the full brunt of the PGDP closure. A recent Associated Press report valued average pay and benefits at the plant at \$125,000 a year, which when multiplied by 1,100 jobs means a \$138 million hit to the local economy. It is already being felt.

But what the GLE proposal does provide is a path forward to recovery of a significant number of quality jobs and a better day, economically, on the near horizon. This project, plus a hoped-for acceleration of cleanup efforts as the old PGDP buildings are decommissioned, would go a long way toward mitigating what is for the short term sure to be a painful experience.

Longer term, however, it will be a great advantage to our region to have a multinational firm of the scale of GE Hitachi as a corporate citizen. The firm is a partnership of U.S.-based GE, known for everything from appliances to wind turbines and jet engines; and Tokyo-based Hitachi, probably best known for energy services, water treatment and high-speed trains. These are two of the world's best capitalized high-tech companies, and having them as investors in our region could bring many dividends in future years.

The GLE re-use proposal is the one favored by local elected and economic development officials, who along with the governor and the region's congressional delegation burned a lot of shoe leather to move it along. The community owes all of them thanks.

While hurdles clearly remain, it looks like the GLE proposal has an excellent chance of becoming reality. The community should stand united behind this effort.